PALESTINE REFUGEES *today*

UNRWA
No.136
July 1994

1994 International Year of the Family

A JOURNALIST'S VIEW
Returning home

PHOTO FEATURE
Images of change

YOUTH
Back on the football pitch

SCHOOL TWINNING
How's the weather in Lebanon?

YEAR OF THE FAMILY
Healthy mothers, healthy families

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FRONT COVER:
Freewheeling with the flag. Beach camp, Gaza Strip.

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Returning home

Born in East Jerusalem, journalist Lima Nabil writes for newspapers and magazines in Jordan and other Arab countries. Just after the signing of the Cairo Agreement between the PLO and Israel on 4 May, she left Amman to make her first journey back to the West Bank and Gaza Strip in over twenty years.

Two brothers - one from Gaza and the other a returning Palestinian policeman - embrace for the first time in 27 years in Aqabat Jabr refugee camp near Jericho.

I couldn't sleep that night. I lay wide awake, gazing into the darkness, turning thoughts of the next day over in my mind. I was to travel to the homeland I had not seen for more than 23 years. Would I still recognize it? The news that people had brought back was varied. They said some cities had changed completely. New parts had been added, while others had vanished.

In the car that took us to the crossing point I was silent. I knew the road to the bridge across the Jordan River very well. I had gone that way hundreds of times - to say goodbye or to welcome friends - but only as far as the bridge. This time, the road took another shape. My heart beat faster and my nerves tensed as we drew closer to the crossing point.

After the formalities, I arrived on the "other side," as we often call it in conversation, near Jericho, once a sleepy Palestinian winter resort and now the dateline for major news stories. Within moments, my apprehension began to disappear. I *did* recognize my homeland. Images of people, places and events flashed before my mind's eye.

Soon I found myself being swept into a pageant of sights and sounds, caught up in the history being made in Jericho and Gaza. The joyous celebrations as the first Palestinian policemen arrived, the tumultuous welcome accorded to returning relatives, the embraces and tears which greeted freed prisoners. Amidst the joy, I sensed the sadness which still dots Gaza's waters and sand dunes and shared the hope that the future would be better than the past.

It was the return of deported Palestinians which touched me most deeply - homecomings which told a myriad of stories about lives marred by years of separation between members of the same family. I savoured the experience of my own return through the emotional reunions which were taking place all around me.

THE LONG ROAD AHEAD

Haj Mustapha lives in Kalandia refugee camp just north of

READEX
FICHE

A GLIMPSE OF JERICHO

"These are my happiest moments," said Mohammad Ajjori, an officer in Aqabat Jabr and Ein el-Sultan refugee camps near Jericho. He was busy taking over from the Israeli civilian administration. "We used to enter these quarters only to receive orders or to be interrogated. It's now been turned into a Palestinian police station," he said. A colleague, Ahmad Ramadan added, "We might face some difficulties, but with our strong morale, we will overcome them. What we seek might not be the present situation but, at least now we can walk about freely, even if it's only around a small spot a few kilometres in size." It is a comment repeated by everyone you meet in Jericho.

Jerusalem. He has spent most of his life tilling the land. His olive trees gave bumper crops during the second year of the *intifadah*. "We did not rejoice because four of my children were in prison and one was ill," said Haj Mustapha, looking lovingly at his son Ahmad, back with the family after 25 years.

Haj Mustafa insisted on planting an olive tree and an orange tree next to the door of his house and vegetables of all sorts on what is left of his yard. A television set, a cupboard and scattered pillows furnish one of the two rooms that make up his house.

His is a typical Palestinian family. "We aren't different from thousands of other Palestinian households whose lives have been torn apart by the long years of occupation, separation and suffering," he said.

"Aren't we also entitled to dream?" he asked. "I had always dreamt of sitting with my six children, talking together like any other family around the world. Not about prisons and deportations. Not about curfews and the demolition of houses. Now, I believe that the dream has, at long last, come true, despite the fact that the road ahead is still very long." The peace process, he said, "deserves to be given a chance." His sons nod in agreement.

The same question - "Aren't we also entitled to dream?" - was echoed by 12-year-old Ayman, in crowded Jabalia refugee camp in Gaza, still hanging on the arm of his brother Nidal, a member of the Palestinian police force. Ayman and many other members of his family, saw Nidal for the first time when he returned with the police from Yemen. Nidal had gone missing in the Palestinian exodus from Lebanon. His family had thought he had been killed.

One hears the same story over and over again in Gaza and in Jericho. Mothers reaching out to touch the faces of their own children for the first time in decades. Fathers lamenting the lost years spent without their loved ones. Differences over the peace process were set aside. Supporters and opponents rallied round to welcome long-lost friends and relatives.

TOGETHER AGAIN

Throughout Gaza and Jericho, families torn apart by imprisonment or deportation, or separated by the dictates of work and study were sitting together again - some of them for the first time in over 20 years. These family reunions would have been impossible only a few weeks earlier.

Like the family of Hussain Abu Lawi for instance. In 1981, Mahmoud, the eldest son, was

Prisoners being released near the central prison in Gaza town, May 1994.

Jabalia camp in Gaza - home for over 70,000 refugees - after a sudden spring rain.

deported to Jordan where he joined the PLO's Badr Force. When we met him in Gaza he looked as happy as a small child. His eyes sparkled as he said, "It feels like time has been condensed to reunite us once again as one family living under the same roof. We eat together and remember all our childhood adventures."

His brother, Mansour, was a third-year student at Ein Shams University, Cairo, when the 1967 war erupted. Unable to return home, he joined the Palestine Liberation Army, spending 22 years moving from one country to another. "I have experienced all the ramifications of the Palestinian diaspora," said Mansour, now 48. "Today, we are together, trying to nurture the traditions of our lost love. Our wounds are still deep and they still are reflected in the way we talk and laugh."

"Today," he continued, "I re-live my childhood. I am once again 'Child Number Seven'. After so many years of recalling only blurred images of my older brothers' presence — 'do this', 'don't do that' - I stand alongside them for the first time in 22 years." But for some reunions it is too late. "Both my parents died before I could see them again," said Mansour, with tears in his eyes.

In Jericho, Ala' gave me a message for his family in Beach refugee camp in Gaza. He said he had not seen them yet, but had talked to them over the phone. He could scarcely wait for his first chance to go to Gaza. His father and brother, also among the returnees, were already there. Some aunts and a grandmother had visited him in Jericho. While he waited for the first full reunion with his family in 15 years Ala'a told me that "meeting the homeland" had been "most exquisite, most beautiful."

AT HOME IN GAZA

That evening, at Ala's family home in the refugee camp in Gaza, I chatted with his family. I heard many stories of the long days of confrontation, steadfastness and suffering which had become part and parcel of everyday life for Palestinians in Gaza.

There are many people Ala' will not be able to see. His first encounters with some of his relatives were to be painful - especially with his youngest brother and a cousin. Both were paralyzed before the age of 12 by bullets fired by Israeli soldiers in retaliation for stones they hurled at the troops, then still the occupiers. The bullets remain embedded in their bodies. Doctors have been unable to remove them.

But Ala' and his family hope that peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis might bring an end to their sorrows and those of many like them. Ala's return to his homeland might herald a new era, unknown to the generations that came before him, who lived as refugees in the Palestinian diaspora in more than one camp and in more than one country.

My encounter with the homeland lasted just three days. I didn't want to leave. Back in Jordan, I had another sleepless night. Will I return? How will it be then?

THE REFUGEE CAMPS

Kalandia camp, just north of Jerusalem, is not that much different from most other West Bank camps, crowded with cement houses and narrow streets. Barbed wire or high walls close in from every side. All exits are closed except for one left for the camp residents to use.

At the edge of the sparkling waters and bright beaches of the Mediterranean's Gaza coast is "Al Shati'" (the Arabic word for "beach") camp with its dreary neighbourhoods, muddy passages and uncovered sewage drainage system. On arrival, the camp seemed deserted. But its residents were there, at the beach their camp is named after, enjoying the freedom to go there whenever they wanted - a freedom which had been restricted during the seven years of the *intifadah*. They had had to make do with feeling the hot rays of the sun and seeing the sand scattered by the wind over the camp's narrow passages. Now that they could go there whenever they wanted, it seemed like they were all there - down at the beach.

Even the graffiti on Gaza's walls has changed. Where Palestinians once scrawled slogans challenging the occupying troops, now they call for authority and order.

On the move

UNRWA launched its Peace Implementation Programme (PIP) in October 1993 to support the Middle East peace process. PIP aims to improve infrastructure and create jobs for Palestinians. With over US $187 million in projects identified so far, UNRWA staff are already making headway on the ground.

UNRWA's Design Unit staff in Jerusalem produce detailed designs for UNRWA construction projects throughout the West Bank.

Since September 1993, parts of the Gaza Strip have already begun to look like huge construction sites. Private construction is booming, but the needs are staggering, especially in the public sector. The inadequate housing stock is under further strain since the arrival of several thousand Palestinian police. Environmental health conditions - especially in the refugee camps - pose a serious risk to public health. Schools and health clinics urgently need upgrading - and more are needed to cope with serious overcrowding. Chronically high unemployment levels in the West Bank and Gaza Strip mean that few Palestinians have spare cash to invest in rebuilding the local economy.

Over 1.1 million of the approximately 2 million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are registered Palestine refugees. UNRWA's PIP projects cover all aspects of the Agency's services to refugees. New schools, new health clinics, reconstruction and renovation of shelters in refugee camps, initiatives in environmental health, repairs to Agency installations and a revolving loan fund for Palestinian businesses are all designed to meet specific needs.

Hundreds of new jobs for Palestinians have been created as UNRWA has hired local contractors to carry out construction work. Whenever possible, supplies are purchased from local sources. Nearly half of the building materials used for UNRWA's shelter rehabilitation programme are manufactured locally.

CLOSE CO-ORDINATION

"We've had close co-ordination between UNRWA, donor countries and the Palestinian authorities about the needs and priorities," said Jabr Nabahin, chief of UNRWA's Projects and Development Office which manages PIP. "Because of the Agency's long experience in the area, we were able to prepare and prioritize project proposals very quickly. I'm pleased to say that donor response has been excellent." Of the US $122 million in projects the Agency has identified in the West Bank and Gaza Strip so far, donors have contributed or pledged over $89 million.

"We are pleased with the ability of local contractors to do quality work and to deliver on time, despite the tremendous increase in volume. Meanwhile, we are monitoring carefully to see how much more work they can manage," Nabahin said.

GETTING STARTED IN GAZA

"I suppose some people might describe the office as organized panic, but we're pleased with how quickly we're getting on with the job," said Richard Cook, chief of UNRWA's shelter rehabilitation programme in the Gaza Strip which has increased its output by about 500 per cent in less than a year. In 1993, UNRWA issued 43 contracts to local builders in Gaza who reconstruct or rehabilitate shelters for the poorest Palestine refugees. So far in 1994, UNRWA has already signed 218 contracts totaling $7.3 million for shelter reconstruction.

"Last year, we had a single team of ten who designed and supervised the work on-site. This year, we've expanded to 40 staff who work in three teams," Cook reported. He estimated that savings made because of improvements in shelter design and very competitive tendering on a recent USAID contract to rebuild 450 shelters would mean that another 60 could be completed. Work on the 450 shelters has created about 175 new jobs for construction workers in Gaza.

PROGRESS IN THE WEST BANK

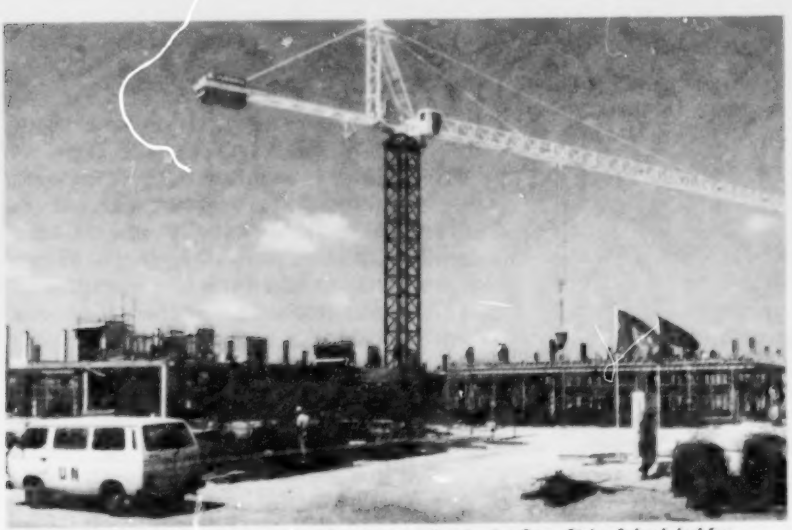
UNRWA's Technical Office in Jerusalem handles virtually all the detailed design and construction supervision for the Agency's operations in the West Bank. "Last year UNRWA implemented just over $5 million in construction in the West Bank. So far in 1994, we're up to about $23 million," said Fritz Brennig, chief of UNRWA's Technical Office in the West Bank.

The office has had to take on over 30 new staff and set up a new design team - all Palestinian - to cope with the additional work. "We have managed both to increase our output and to reduce the turnaround time for projects by about fifty per cent," Brennig reported. He estimated that between 400 and 500 new jobs in the construction sector would be created by the new work.

Schoolboys exercise in the yard of the new UNRWA preparatory school in Jabalia camp, Gaza, built using funds from Norway. The old school - still in use - is in the background on the left.

PIP IN JORDAN, LEBANON AND SYRIA

Over 1.8 million Palestine refugees live in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic and their needs for better education, health care and housing should also be met. UNRWA has identified over US $65 million in projects to improve facilities and services for refugees in these countries. So far, the Agency has received $10.2 million to finance these projects.



The new 232-bed UNRWA hospital under construction in the Gaza Strip. Scheduled for completion in December 1995, it will be the first new hospital built in Gaza since 1967.

THE NEXT STEP

UNRWA is now reviewing and revising the unfunded projects which were initially circulated to donors and will combine them with newly developed projects which need funding. "We are liaising with the Palestinian authorities to see how UNRWA can assist them further with these new projects," Nabahin said. "We hope to launch this second phase of project proposals to donors in September. In the meantime, we're getting on with the work and we believe these improvements will make a real difference in the quality of life for thousands of Palestine refugees."

Healthy mothers - healthy families

UNRWA has provided primary health services to refugees since 1950. It's been a history of success. UNRWA is now responding to new demands for an improved system of maternal and infant health care.

A refugee family in Gaza town.

The need is there. It's our task to offer information, education and services and to improve family health," said Dr. Mohammad Abdelmoumène, UNRWA's Director of Health. "Our goal is reproductive health, not birth control. Despite our success in reducing maternal and infant mortality over the years, short birth intervals and multiple pregnancies pose two of the most serious health risks both for mothers and for children," Dr. Abdelmoumène went on. "That's why we've launched a major initiative to decrease maternal and infant mortality and to integrate family planning services within our maternal and child health programme by introducing services for fertility regulation throughout our health care system which are consistent with World Health Organization policy."

CHANGING ATTITUDES

Attitudes among the refugees are also changing. "When women have too many children, we simply can't meet all their needs," reported one woman in Gaza. Another woman said that she wanted to give each of her children more of her time. "I also realize that my own health will be better if my husband and I wait longer between each child." Comments like these illustrate that the attitudes of Palestine refugee women towards reproductive health have evolved over the years because of increased health awareness, rising literacy rates and mounting economic difficulties.

A 1993 survey of refugee women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip on their Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) towards reproductive health revealed that over 83 per cent of refugee women interviewed in Gaza and over 95 per cent of women in the West Bank approved of fertility regulation. When asked about their intentions towards future use of family planning methods, over 50 per cent of women in Gaza - and nearly two-thirds in the West Bank - said they planned to use some form of fertility regulation in the next twelve months.

Suad Ayesh is one of the first women in Gaza who studied nursing. Mrs. Ayesh runs family planning sessions in UNRWA clinics with women who volunteer to learn more about fertility regulation. She enjoys her work. "There are a lot of misconceptions about family planning among the community. It's rewarding to pass on information which will improve the quality of life for the next generation," she said.

A NEW STRATEGY

UNRWA has become much more active in family planning since 1989 when a meeting which brought together UNRWA, local NGOs and government health care providers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip gave its unanimous support for a more active family planning component as part of an overall strategy to improve maternal and child health services.

Working closely with UNFPA, UNRWA staff have upgraded maternal health care and have introduced family planning services in the West Bank and are expanding them in the Gaza Strip. To achieve this, UNRWA worked closely with local family planning associations throughout its area of operations to set up a training programme for UNRWA medical and nursing staff. Training programmes for medical staff in each field were complemented by inter-field workshops supported by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and funded by contributions from the Canadian and U.S. Governments.

It's an ambitious programme. UNRWA's Health Department has been reorganized to include a new Division of Family Health which will have primary responsibility for maternal and infant care as well as family planning. The aims are to increase the coverage of UNRWA's maternal health care services from approximately 70 per cent today to at least 85 per cent within five years and to enable women to regulate their fertility by avoiding pregnancies which are too frequent, too closely spaced or too early or late in life. Dr. Arafat Hidmi, chief of UNRWA's health programme in the West Bank, sums it up. "Our overall aim is to improve the quality of life for Palestine refugees."

PROGRESS - AND PROBLEMS

Dr. Hidmi is pleased with progress so far in the new programme. "We've had good acceptance from women and their husbands as well as from UNRWA medical staff. We are not 'birth controllers,' we are taking care of the women and children. It's the woman's decision; we give her the assistance."

But there are also problems to overcome. "One of the key constraints in expanding our family planning services is the general lack of funds and our need to balance the use of scarce financial and staff resources," said Dr. Abdelmoumène. "At the same time, we are working closely with the Palestinian Health Council and the World Health Organization. It's important to co-ordinate our activities because, when the right time comes, we want to ensure a smooth transfer of a comprehensive service to the relevant local authority."

An UNRWA health worker speaks with women in Daraj clinic, Gaza town.

Images of Change

Even before PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat moved to the Gaza Strip in July, the visual landscape in Gaza and Jericho had already begun to change after the PLO and Israel signed the Cairo Agreement in May 1994. This issue of Palestine Refugees Today *features a selection of photos taken recently by UNRWA photographers which depict some of the dramatic - and many of the more subtle - changes which affect the lives of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians living in Jericho and the Gaza Strip.*

Cement-filled barrels, installed by Israeli security forces, block one of the entrances to Dheisheh refugee camp in the West Bank.

The same view of Dheisheh after the barrels were removed. T camp is home for nearly 9,000 refugees.

Jericho. Women join in the celebrations to mark the arrival of the Palestinian police on 13 May 1994.

Jabalia camp just north of Gaza town, was the scene of almost daily clashes for the past six years. The only trace left of the Israeli occupation is the tall observation tower and some barrels which were used to block nearby streets. Children now play on the barrels.

1 July 1994. PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat waves to a jubilant crowd after crossing the Rafah checkpoint in southern Gaza.

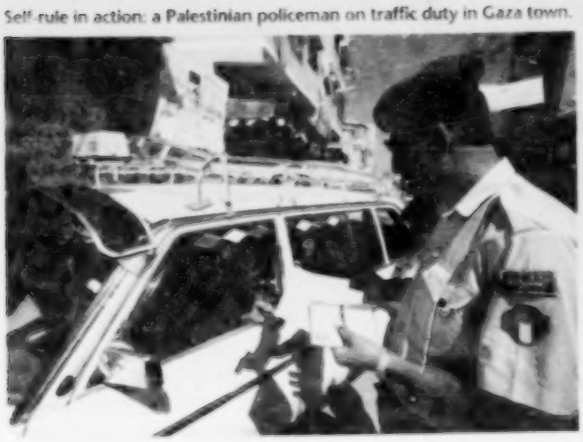
A family reunited. A Palestinian who has been released from an Israeli prison greets a relative. Thousands of similar reunions have taken place throughout Gaza and Jericho.

The main street in Gaza town bedecked with banners which spell out greetings from local businessmen expressing congratulations on freedom for Gaza and welcoming the Palestinian police and the return of deportees.

New recruits in the Palestinian police force jog along the beach in Gaza at the start of their training for the day.

A "sign" of change on the coastal road south of Gaza town.

Self rule in action: a Palestinian policeman on traffic duty in Gaza town.



The ingredients for success

A splash of colour - Abu Saleh and his son display their latest crop of carnations near Aleppo.

Two Palestine refugee businessmen, both with disabilities, have discovered different paths to achieve economic independence for themselves and their families.

A splash of colours - pink, white, yellow and red - catches your eye as you enter Neirab refugee camp, near Aleppo in northern Syria, signalling the success of Abdul Rahim Saleh 'Allou, a Palestine refugee who turned a small grant into a flourishing carnation business.

His own business sense and a grant from UNRWA brought the change of fortune for Abu Saleh, 55. A refugee since the age of nine, he broke his back in an accident in 1980 and was able to find work only as a casual farm labourer.

When he heard of UNRWA's self-support project scheme he signed up immediately. "I was convinced that this might be the chance for me to escape from my chronic money worries," said Abu Saleh.

UNRWA paid LS 84,000 to help him start his carnation business in a plastic greenhouse close to his house. This sum included LS 2,000 for the rental of a 1,000 metres-square plot of land for the first year.

Abu Saleh chose to grow carnations because he had learned from friends that they were cheaper to produce than other flowers and they were also quite resistant to weather changes. Initially, he bought the nursery plants from a supplier. He now produces nursery plants himself and sells them to other flower growers.

"At last I have the security of a steady income for my family. Income is very seasonal. Some months I earn LS 4,000 or more. It depends on whether there are festivals," Abu Saleh said.

UNRWA SUPPORT

UNRWA welfare staff continue to visit Abu Saleh's venture. 'Imad Jadiba, Area Welfare Officer, Aleppo, said: "We have confidence in Abu

Saleh. He has shown that he has all the ingredients for success. He is good in marketing, he has experience and enjoys what he is doing but the bottom line is that he has a commercially viable business. People want carnations."

FURNITURE FOR GAZA

Life looked bleak for Mousa Wa'aeri when he returned to Gaza from Kuwait, paralysed in the legs from an injury received at the onset of the Persian Gulf war in January 1991. He didn't leave his house for six months.

Now Mousa, forty, manoeuvres his wheelchair around his own Gaza furniture workshop employing people with disabilities. "I felt it was my duty to open a workshop to employ disabled persons. I am using my few savings to buy the raw material and to pay the workers," he said. Bamboo chairs, sofas, bookshelves and tables are on display at the shop which opened earlier this year.

The turning point came for Mousa when he was sent to a rehabilitation centre in Ramallah for training in mobility and everyday activities. He gained the courage to start a new life, acquiring a driving licence and a special car.

Mousa turned his disability to an advantage, finding that he was able to relate easily to other people in a similar situation. "There is no barrier between us," he said. Now he fits the day-to-day tasks of the workshop to his workers' abilities.

UNRWA: ENCOURAGING SELF-RELIANCE

Since UNRWA launched its self-support small grant scheme in 1983, over 800 of the poorest Palestine refugee families have received grants through the programme. The programme aims to alleviate poverty and to raise the living standard of refugees facing severe economic and social hardship, as well as helping them to become less dependent on charity and to gain self- respect. With cash grants averaging less than $4,000, over half of these families have achieved economic independence and no longer depend on the Agency's special hardship assistance.

Since 1991, the Agency has also operated an income generation programme, targeted at small and medium-sized businesses run by Palestinians. So far, UNRWA has disbursed over $4,000,000 in loans, primarily in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The overall repayment rate is over 90 per cent.

A FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

The success of his approach is borne out by comments made by his employees. Tala'at El-Khatib, a middle-aged man, has no wheelchair and is brought to work every day by Mousa himself. "I refused several offers to work in other places because I was not psychologically comfortable," said Tala'at. "Here, I feel relaxed. My employer is very considerate and understands me very well." Mousa adds, "Tala'at has experience in old designs and he is being trained in modern ones which suit his disability."

Even 19-year-old Mahmoud, who has a learning disability, has found a place in this unique workshop. "He is new here and we're training him on some simple work which suits his disability," said Mousa.

Mousa is pleased with his business so far. "My customers know that our furniture is produced by disabled persons. Despite the economic difficulties people face now, business is growing. And I'm proud to say that the workshop is owned and run by a disabled person."

Mousa - temporarily out of his wheelchair - sits on a foam mat finishing the wicker work on a sofa frame in his workshop in the Gaza Strip.

The long road

Wherever they live, Palestine refugees have always worked to rebuild their lives and to create a better future for themselves and their families. Mohammad's struggle against the odds is only one of hundreds of such tales.

Computer-aided design is an important production tool in Mohammad's factory.

It's not easy to make good if you're a refugee. You start from nothing and you may go back there more than once in a lifetime. Entrepreneur Mohammad Suleiman Mukahhal, a Palestine refugee now running his own fashion company in Jordan, knows this only too well.

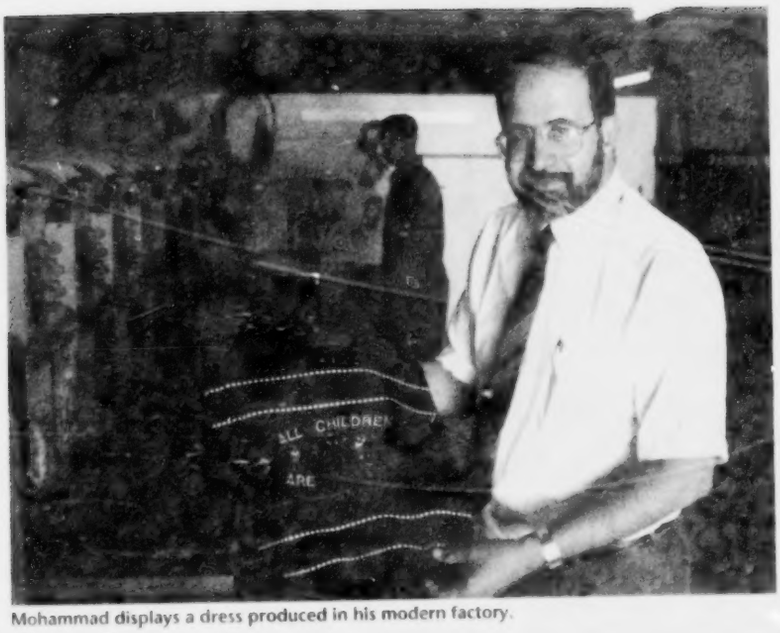
MOVING ON

Mohammad was only five years old when the 1948 Arab-Israeli war broke out. Along with thousands of others, he fled barefoot with his family from their home in Qaqoun in the former British mandate territory of Palestine to the safety of Tulkarm in what is now the West Bank. His parents carried their few possessions with them.

He moved on with them to Jordan, qualified as a welder, a draughtsman, a designer in an engineering office and a mechanical engineer, gaining a good job with an oil company in Kuwait. Then, in 1990, at the age of 47, he and thousands of other Palestinians had to leave Kuwait and return to Jordan after the Persian Gulf crisis. Mohammad had his own family of nine by then - and nothing else apart from his knowledge, versatility and experience.

Yet within two years, he received compensation and used it to set up a fashion company - "The National Modern Wear Company" - with a friend. Now, in 1994, the business has already expanded to become the sole agent for electronic embroidery machines, not only in Jordan but also throughout the Middle East, said Mohammad (or Abu Suleiman as he is also called).

Mohammad's story is all the more remarkable because he had previously dealt with oil, and never with clothes. "After survey studies, I found that industry and the petroleum business require many skills of which I have only a few. My studies also revealed that the service sector is likely to develop and grow. However, I began my business with some reservations at first, until it proved to be productive and rewarding," he said.



Mohammad displays a dress produced in his modern factory.

A DIVERSE CAREER

His diverse career began back in 1961 when, after graduating from secondary school, he joined UNRWA's Wadi Seer Training Centre in Amman to learn welding as a trade. His father could not afford to send him to university but hoped that the Wadi Seer training would help his son find work and contribute to the family's upkeep. "He who has a trade owns a castle," he told Mohammad.

After his graduation from the centre in 1963, UNRWA awarded him a scholarship to study "Foremanship and Instructor Techniques" at the Siblin Training Centre in Lebanon. Then UNRWA sent him with other students to Sweden to study draughtsmanship.

Armed with the certificate awarded to him by the Agency, Mohammad found a job with the American Oil Company in Kuwait, working in the design section of its engineering department from 1965 to 1974. After that, he joined the National Petroleum Company as the head of the maintenance section until 1982 when he enrolled in an American University where he took a B.Sc. degree in mechanical engineering. Subsequently, he worked with the Getty Oil Company in Kuwait until he returned to Jordan in August 1990.

STARTING OVER - AGAIN

His fashion company originally provided jobs for four employees. It now employs 12. "Our products and designs are now being sold in Jordan and in neighbouring countries," said Mohammad. His business combines the use of traditional designs with the latest computerised design and manufacturing technology, in many cases recreating and adapting patterns from the Palestinians' past via the computer screen.

Mohammad's hope now is that he will be able to expand production further, especially towards the West Bank, something which would give him satisfaction not only as a businessman but also as a Palestinian. "It is everyone's obligation to invest their resources and skills in building up their homeland and society," said Mohammad.

UNRWA AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Wadi Seer Vocational Training Centre in Jordan and Siblin Training Centre in Lebanon played a crucial role in Mohammad's training. They are only two of UNRWA's eight vocational, technical and commercial training centres. Over the years, these centres, staffed and managed by refugees, have given over 46,000 Palestine refugees the skills they needed to make a better future for themselves. Course topics include metal, electrical and building trades, commercial and business studies, technical studies, paramedical studies and vocational courses for women.

A young woman learns new skills in her laboratory technician's course at Ramallah Women's Training Centre in the West Bank.

Back on the football pitch

The Kalandia youth activities centre football team.

For many years, Palestinian teenagers and young men living in the refugee camps of the West Bank and Gaza Strip have had nowhere to meet, play sports and organize help for their local communities. Their youth activities centres (YACs) were closed on security grounds. Since late 1993, these centres have been reopening. The young men are delighted, but know there's much to be done.

Rusting iron reinforcing rods sprawl like tangled weeds from an unfinished, decaying foundation at the entrance. But the energetic boys playing football on the cement playground and the 21 neatly-arranged trophies along the wall in the newly-renovated meeting room nearby show that order is returning and new life has sprung up here.

This is the youth activities centre (YAC) in Rafah refugee camp near the southern border of the Gaza Strip, one of many which are gradually reopening in UNRWA's refugee camps in Gaza and the West Bank. The Rafah centre was closed by the Israeli authorities in 1983. All the others were closed during the years leading up to the *intifadah*. The premises fell into disrepair.

"It was terrible. The young people had nowhere to play organized sports here in the camp for 10 years," said Mohammad Hatab, a handicrafts teacher in a local UNRWA preparatory school who has volunteered his services as chairman of the centre's committee. "I used to be a football player and later a referee. Sport is in my blood. I can't get away from it," Mohammad laughed.

A JOINT UN INITIATIVE

Almost all of the work of rebuilding the YACs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is done by local youth. But cash is also needed. Funding for materials and equipment largely comes from a joint UNRWA/UNDP/UNICEF initiative, with additional financing from international NGOs. For example, an Australian NGO, AUSTCARE paid for the installation of floodlights at the Rafah centre in Gaza.

REOPENING IN RAFAH

Last November, word came that the Rafah centre could reopen. "We were excited to hear the news, but depressed to see the mess inside," said Mr. Hatab. "The place was in a terrible state. The roof leaked all over. Our library was ruined. The windows and doors all needed to be replaced." Using funds contributed by UNRWA and an Australian NGO, local youth started rebuilding and restoring the centre voluntarily.

The facilities are basic, but impressive. The equipment in the spacious weightlifting room has all been built locally as well as the karate/boxing ring next door. Local teams and others use the rooms for training. "Our athletic trainers have a lot of experience, but no one has any special training. We'd like someone with proper training," said Mr. Hatab.

"We've got one of the best football teams in Gaza," said Yusuf Mahmoud Ghanam, a centreback

The trophy room at the youth activities centre in Rafah, Gaza Strip.

who plays on the first team. Like most of the 2,000 youth in the camp who use the centre, Yusuf is unemployed.

KALANDIA STARTS OVER

The YAC in Kalandia camp in the West Bank is located next to the main road between Jerusalem and Ramallah. It was closed in December 1981 by the Israeli authorities and used as a military base during the *intifadah*.

"We only had 300 members before the centre was closed. Now, after reopening late last year, we have over 800 members," said Mohammad 'Araj, the centre administrator. About 40 per cent of the centre's members are students, mainly at universities in the West Bank. Mohammad estimated that only about 20 per cent of the rest had steady jobs now.

"We are currently organizing a summer camp for over 400 boys and girls in the camp. We organize sports, trips to other parts of the West Bank, even tutorials for some of the children," said Mohammad.

Children play basketball next to an unfinished building foundation at the youth activities centre in Rafah, Gaza Strip.

LOCAL ELECTIONS

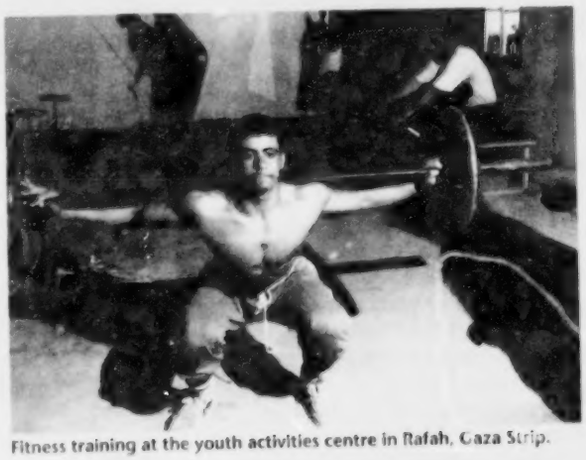
The recent elections for the centre's committee provoked widespread interest among the youth in the camp. "Everyone was excited. The candidates put up posters and made speeches; it was great fun. We had a voter turnout of 95 per cent," reported Mohammad.

The Kalandia centre is a member of the union of youth activities centres in the West Bank which coordinates sports and cultural activities in the centres. "We have an excellent team here and we would like to set up a football league," said Ahmad Mansour, a centreback and volunteer coach of the first team. Ahmad works as a clerk in the local UNRWA health clinic.

HELPING THE COMMUNITY

The young men who use these centres also do much more than play football and indoor games. "One of the main reasons we're here is to help the community. We organize cleaning campaigns in the schools and streets. Our young people help to build and repair shelters for poor people in the camp. They also help deliver UNRWA's emergency food assistance to the doorsteps of needy families. It's an excellent way for the youth to help the community and learn new skills at the same time," said Mr. Hatab in Rafah.

The youth in Kalandia helped to finish the construction of a health clinic in the camp. They're planning to set up their own theatre and dance group at the centre, performing comedy and serious plays for camp residents and visitors.

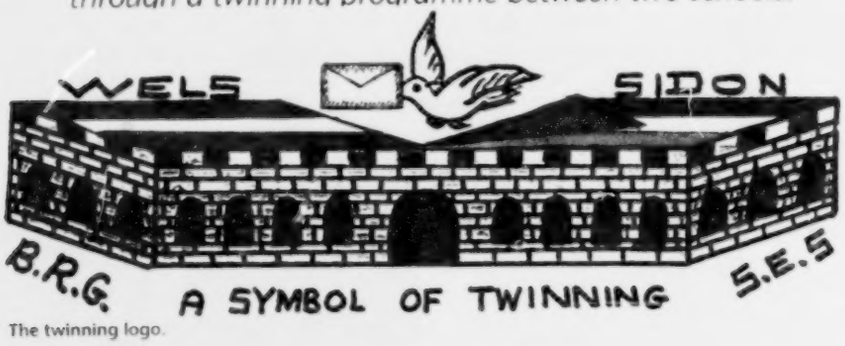


Fitness training at the youth activities centre in Rafah, Gaza Strip.

Hosni Ibzah, a newly elected member of the committee in Kalandia, summed it up. "We would like to do more, both at the centre and for our community. We have the ideas. Using only volunteer labour and with little spare cash around, it's difficult to make progress. We're hoping for better times. We'll just have to wait and see."

Dear Wissam, What's the weather like in Lebanon?

The palm trees and heat of southern Lebanon and the pine trees and snow of Upper Austria seem poles apart. Yet these two separate worlds have been connected on an almost daily basis for the past four years through a twinning programme between two schools.



The twinning logo.

Salamah is a small elementary UNRWA school of about 300 pupils and ten teachers in the old town of Sidon (known locally as Saida) in Lebanon. The school in Wels, Upper Austria, has more than 920 pupils and 86 teachers. At first sight they have little in common but now pupils and staff at both are linked by a bond of friendship.

It all began in 1990 when 15 small gift parcels collected by the Junior Austrian Red Cross arrived at Salamah via UNRWA's Area Welfare Officer in Saida, prompting headmaster, Salah Hamad, to suggest that his school be twinned with one of the senders.

The BRG or "Bundesgymnasium-Bundesrealgymnasium" school responded. Professor Ferdinand Kossemeier of BRG officially approved the twinning arrangement in November 1990. Since then, two teams of 30 children from each school have been corresponding regularly in English. Their letters give a vivid picture of life in the two countries.

SHARING WITH FRIENDS

*** BRG supplied a photocopier worth $3,000 as a gift to Salama School, sent pocket money for two six-year-old orphans as well as a special contribution, letters and gifts for 25 particularly needy pupils.**

*** The stream of letters between the school children in Saida and Wels is only one of several successful school twinning arrangements in which students attending UNRWA schools exchange letters, photos and even home videos with children living in other countries. For information about how schoolchildren in your country might be involved in this scheme, please contact UNRWA.**

I LOVE MY MUM

"Dear Karin," writes Hadieh Taleb, a 13-year-old pupil from Salama, "I live in Saida with my family, my mother, five sisters and three brothers. My father died four years ago. He was a blacksmith. My mother has no work. I love my mother very much. She is all my life."

"Hello Maya, I live with my parents in Scharten. I have two brothers. Roland is 19 years old and Bernard 13 years. I play an instrument - the violincello. It's a big violin," writes Elisenda from BRG.

2 JUNE: OFFICIAL TWINNING DAY

June 2 is now official twinning day, and a logo, designed by the arts teacher at Salama, is being used

by both schools on letters and posters. It shows, appropriately, a carrier pigeon, with letter in beak, flying from Saida to Wells, over a high school stadium showing the Austrian and Palestinian flags.

Naturally enough, the letters have been followed up by a personal visit. When the Austrian school marked its twenty-fifth anniversary in September 1992, Salah Hamad was invited by BRG Headmaster Dr. Walter Aspernig to join in celebrations.

"It was a very successful visit," Professor Kossemeier told PRT. "We feel as if Salah is our friend and colleague and the children have benefited enormously from the programme. Many of them know a lot more about Lebanon and have become very interested in the politics and the daily life of the region."

Prof. Kossemeier and Salah Hammad with pupils in Wels.

While in Austria, Mr. Hamad visited UNRWA Headquarters in Vienna to report on the twinning project. "A big thank-you is due to UNRWA seniors in Vienna and Beirut for fostering the communication line between Salama School, Saida and BRG, Wels," he said.

LET'S TALK ABOUT PHYSICS

The programme has proved so popular that when Salah Hamad was transferred to UNRWA's Hittin Intermediate School at the Ein el-Hilweh Camp in Saida in 1992, another 100 pupils from Hittin school joined the project, leading to a new exchange of letters.

"I was very surprised when I read through your letter and found out that you have four brothers and eight sisters. It's unimaginable for an average Austrian family to have so many children. I have just one little brother...," "Simone from BRG writes to Wissam at Hittin, adding, "At the moment the weather in Austria is most of the time sunny. What's the weather like in Lebanon?"

And Hani, writing from Hittin to Sarah, says it is the first time he has ever written a letter, but he adds, "You told me your favourite subject is physics. It's my favourite subject too, so we can write about this subject in later letters."

Prof. Kossemeier and Salah Hamad shake hands during a visit by Mr. Hamad to the BRG school in Wels, Austria in 1992.

FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES

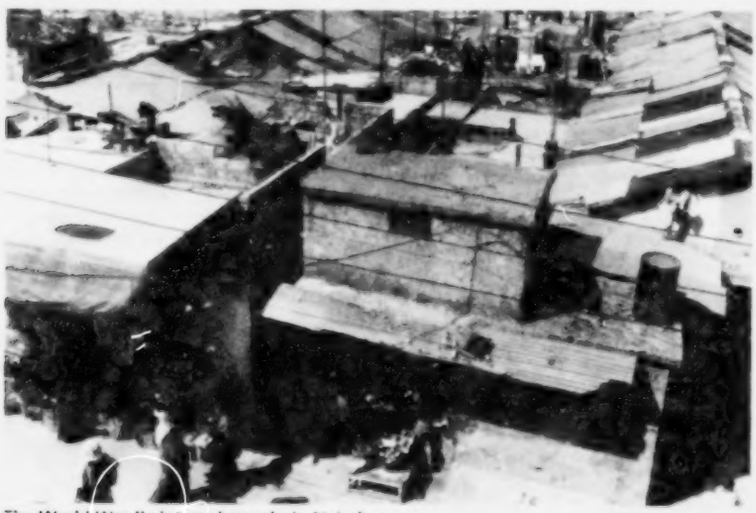
Professor Kossemeier said the essential success story of the twinning programme was that the students and staff saw their counterparts in Lebanon as friends and colleagues. "We've all been impressed with the high standard of English in the letters. We would like to invite some of the children from Lebanon to come to our school in the future."

Similarly heartfelt words on the scheme's success come from Salah Hamad in a letter he wrote to Professor Kossemeier: "The seed we've planted together in Saida and Wels since 1990 is growing deep into the hearts of our colleagues to the best enjoyment of our beloved children."

BRG children locate their penfriends on the map.

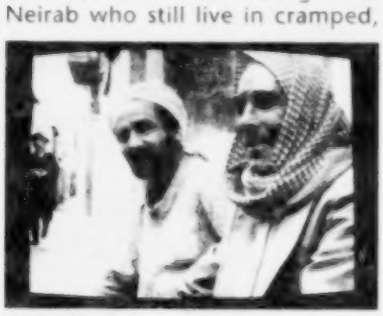
Rebuilding in Neirab

Refugees living near the town of Aleppo in northern Syria face increasing problems as their shelters decay. An UNRWA video story broadcast by Cable News Network and other TV stations points out that some may face brighter prospects.



The World War II vintage barracks in Neirab camp.

Reporter: Mariam has cause for complaint. In winter, the rain pours through the roof of her home in Neirab camp near Aleppo in northern Syria. She is one of more than 3,000 Palestine refugees in Neirab who still live in cramped,



leaky barracks built as temporary housing for British soldiers in the 1950s. Conditions are appalling.

Woman refugee: *"There is no adequate accommodation, no sewerage, no basics at all. Streets are the only place for children to play and enjoy themselves."*

Reporter: The UN Relief and Works Agency has been running health, education and social services for the refugees, on a very tight budget, since they fled Palestine more than 40 years ago. The Agency now has a plan to help those refugees living in the worst conditions.

Robert Hopkins, UNRWA Director in Syria: *"We hope to get financing from donor countries. The first phase will cost one-and-a-half million dollars and will include building new housing in Ein El-Tel camp. This will accommodate about 600 people, about a third of the refugees who need to be rehoused."*

Reporter: The Syrian Government established Ein el-Tel camp in the 1960s to house refugees who were still living in mosques or public buildings. UNRWA facilities serve its 3,000 inhabitants.

This site in Ein El-Tel is where UNRWA hopes to move the refugees in future. The contrast is enormous. Plenty of fresh air, lots of space and just 12 kilometres from Aleppo. But how do the refugees feel about leaving the camp that has been home to them for four decades?

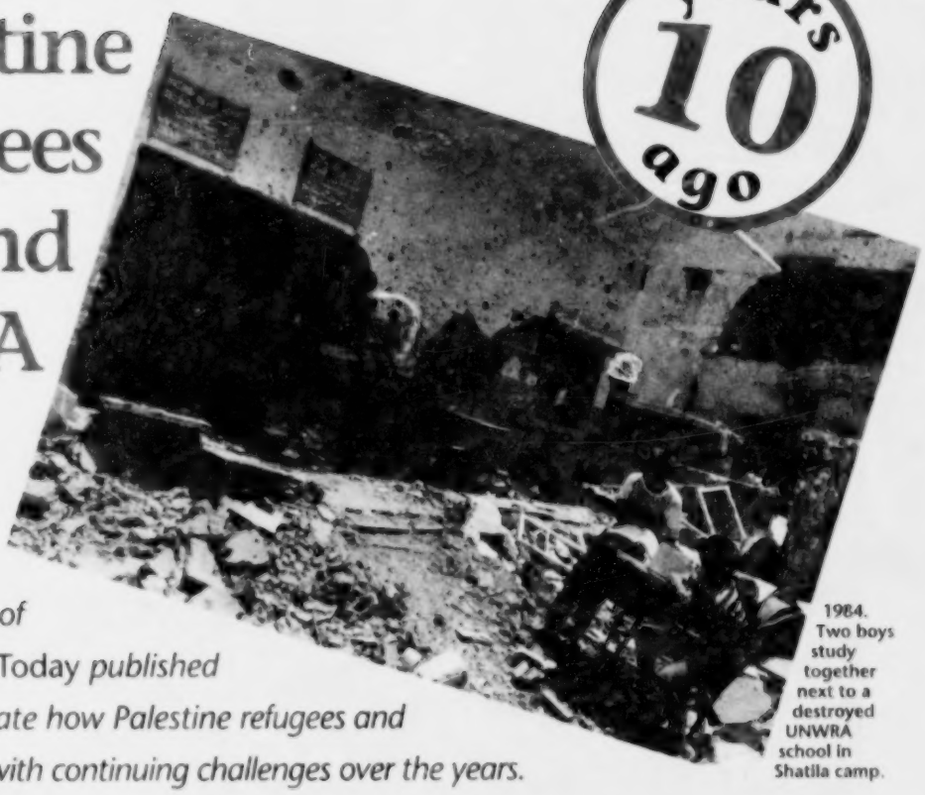
Woman refugee: *"We hope to have a better house some day, at*

least a sunny one. I think my family would love to move to a bigger house."

Reporter: The United States Government has just pledged 1.6 million dollars for the first phase of the scheme. So, for at least some of the refugees, the long wait for decent housing will soon be over.

Palestine Refugees and UNRWA

10 years ago



1984. Two boys study together next to a destroyed UNWRA school in Shatila camp.

Extracts from issues of Palestine Refugees Today *published 10 years ago illustrate how Palestine refugees and UNRWA have dealt with continuing challenges over the years.*

NEW COMPUTER HELPS MONITOR HEALTH

"Thanks to modern computer technology, more than 5,000 babies born to Palestine refugee mothers in the West Bank are having their health monitored closely.

The analysis has found that most pregnant women in the West Bank fail to add weight adequately during pregnancy and that 6.8 per cent of Palestine refugee infants in the area register a below normal weight at birth. Since this is a major contributory factor to infant mortality and malnutrition, UNRWA's West Bank field health office in Jerusalem plans to study further the relationship between the mother's weight and the infant's weight at birth. A $5,000 personal computer - a gift of the World Health Organization (WHO) - will greatly help this work." *(PRT No. 108 Oct 1984)*

LEBANON APPEAL

"At the end of June 1983, UNRWA launched its $ 13 million appeal for the first phase of a programme to rebuild Agency installations and camp infrastructure in Lebanon and to supplement housing repair grants already given to the poorest refugees. By June 1984, some $ 6.2 million had been pledged in response to this appeal, and reconstruction work was already under way.

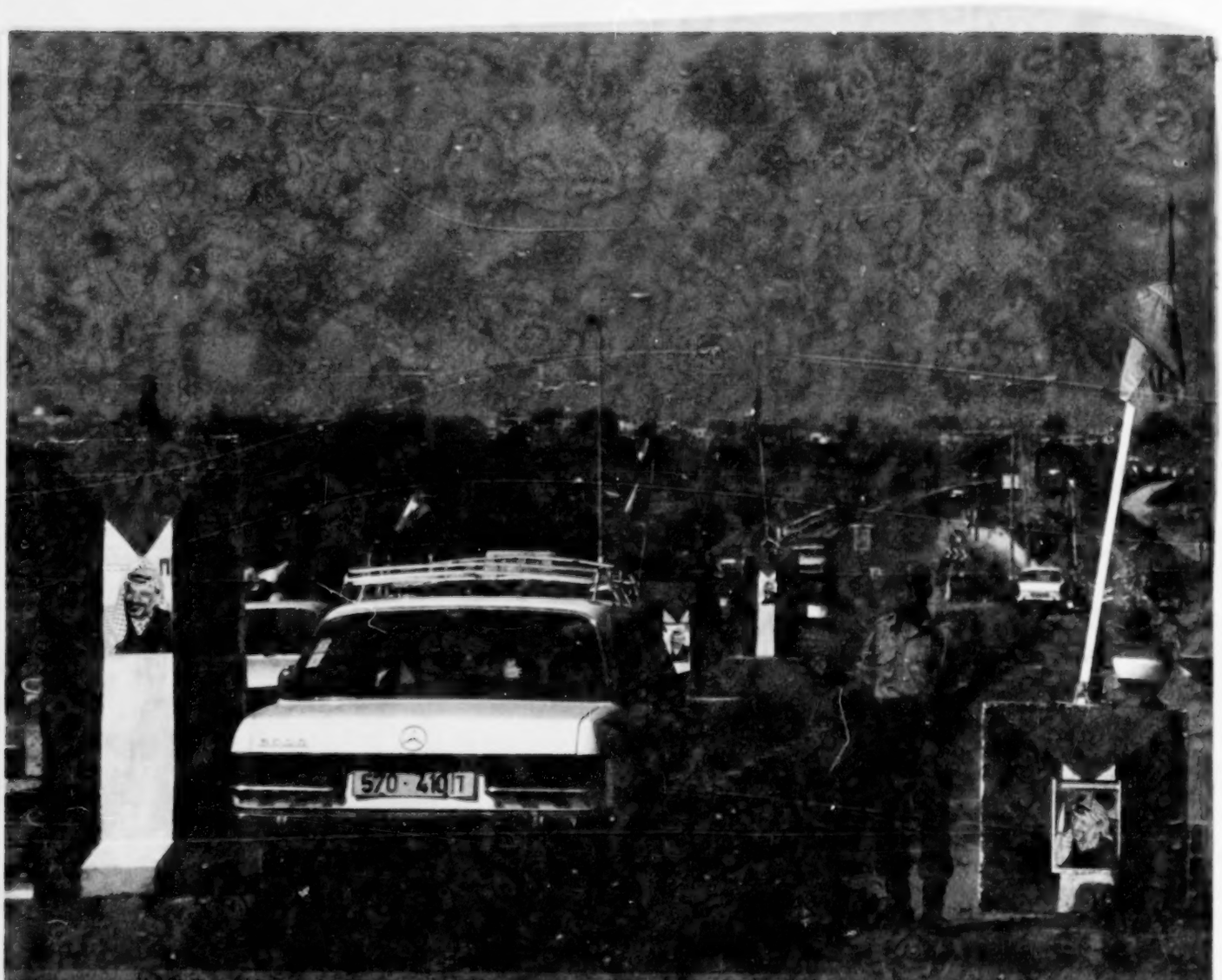
UNRWA's attention in Lebanon was initially focused on relieving the plight of refugees caught in the fighting around Tripoli. Those troubles were followed at the end of December by renewed heavy fighting and destruction in the Beirut area, including Shatila camp, and in early January by the Israeli air raids on Wavell camp in the Beqa'a." *(PRT No. 107 July 1984)*

A WINNER IN 1984

"A 14-year old student at UNRWA's Rusaifeh Girls' Preparatory School north of Amman, Jordan, has won an essay competition sponsored by the Director of UNRWA Affairs in Jordan. The winner, Arwa Husni Odwan, was born in 1969 in Amman. Her family is originally from Tubsir village near Jaffa. In 1948 the family fled to the Tulkarm area and in 1967 they fled again to the east bank of the Jordan. Arwa topped her class this year and has ambitions to become a chemical engineer." *(PRT No. 107 July 1984)*

A WINNER - 1994 UPDATE

Ms. Odwan has just received her medical degree from a university in the Russian Federation. She was able to attend the university with the help of a scholarship from the Union of Soviet Women. She now plans to return to Jordan to work as a medical doctor.



PALESTINE REFUGEES *today*

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